

What is claimed is:

1. An optical object detector comprising:
  - a feed path;
  - a reference pattern facing the feed path;
  - an optical sensor configured to view the reference pattern through the feed path, absence of the reference pattern from the view of the optical sensor indicating presence of an object in the feed path.
2. The optical object detector of claim 1, wherein the reference pattern reliably differs from patterns of objects in the feed path as viewed by the optical sensor.
3. The optical object detector of claim 1, which further comprises a light source configured to direct light across the feed path, and wherein the optical sensor includes one or more corresponding light receptors configured to receive corresponding reflected light reflected from the feed path such that the reflected light is indicative of optical sensor view.
4. The optical object detector of claim 1, which further comprises a comparator in operative communication with the optical sensor to receive a signal indicative of an viewable pattern viewed by the optical sensor, the comparator being configured to compare the viewable pattern with the reference pattern, a predetermined difference between the viewable pattern and the reference pattern indicating obstruction of the reference pattern.
5. The optical object detector of claim 1, wherein the optical sensor includes a scanner and wherein the reference pattern at least partially defines a backing to a scan region along the feed path such that absence of the reference pattern from view of the scanner indicates presence of a to-be-scanned object in the scan region.

6. The optical object detector of claim 5, wherein the reference pattern extends substantially across the backing, transverse to the feed path.

5 7. The optical object detector of claim 5, wherein the backing is selectively retractable from the scan region.

8. The optical object detector of claim 5, wherein the backing is pivotally retractable upon passage of a to-be-scanned object into the scan region, thereby removing the reference pattern from view of the scanner.

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9. The optical object detector of claim 1, wherein the reference pattern includes a plurality of stripes.

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10. A method of detecting an object in a feed path, the method comprising:

viewing the feed path to identify a viewable pattern, the viewable pattern nominally being a reference pattern disposed opposite a point of view through the feed path;

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comparing the viewable pattern to the reference pattern, a predetermined difference between the viewable pattern and the reference pattern indicating presence of an object in the feed path.

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11. The method of claim 10, wherein the viewing the feed path includes emitting light toward a scan region of the feed path and detecting light reflected from the scan region, such reflected light defining the viewable pattern.

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12. The method of claim 11, which further comprises feeding an object through the scan region to alter view of the reference pattern from the point of view through the scan region.

13. The method of claim 11, which further comprises feeding an object through the scan region to obstruct view of the reference pattern.

14. The method of claim 11, which further comprises feeding an object through the scan region to displace the reference pattern.

5 15. The method of claim 11, wherein viewing the feed path and comparing the viewable pattern to the reference pattern are performed iteratively, and wherein initially noting the predetermined difference between the viewable pattern and the reference pattern indicates entry of the object into the scan region.

10 16. The method of claim 15, which further comprises iteratively recording viewable patterns to define a scanned image upon noting the predetermined difference between the viewable pattern and the reference pattern.

15 17. The method of claim 16, which further comprises ceasing recording of viewable patterns upon noting substantial identity between the viewable pattern and the reference pattern.

20 18. A method of directing scanning in an imaging device, the method comprising:

iteratively viewing a scan region, from opposite a backing having a reference pattern thereon, to identify a viewable pattern in the scan region; and

25 upon noting a change in the viewable pattern from a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern to a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern, beginning recording of iteratively viewed viewable patterns.

30 19. The method of claim 18, which further comprises, upon noting a change in the viewable pattern from a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern to a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern, ceasing recording of iteratively viewed viewable patterns.

20. The method of claim 7, wherein viewing the scan region includes emitting an array of light toward the scan region and detecting a corresponding array of light reflected from the scan region.

5 21. An imaging device comprising:

feed mechanism configured to direct an object along a feed path through a scan region of the imaging device;

a backing to the scan region, the backing defining a reference pattern;

an optical sensor configured to view the scan region to identify a viewable pattern as viewed by the optical sensor;

10 a processor configured to identify presence in the scan region of an object which is to be scanned by the imaging device based on comparison of the viewable pattern with the reference pattern.

15 22. The imaging device of claim 21, wherein the optical sensor is configured to periodically view the scan region, and wherein the processor is configured to record viewable patterns which are different from the reference pattern.

20 23. The imaging device of claim 22, wherein the reference pattern is selected to reliably differ from viewable patterns of objects in the feed path.

25 24. The imaging device of claim 21, which further comprises a light source configured to generate a light array directed across the feed path, and wherein the optical sensor includes one or more corresponding light receptors configured to receive a corresponding reflected light array reflected from the feed path such that the reflected light array is indicative of optical sensor view.

25. The imaging device of claim 21, wherein the reference pattern extends substantially across the backing, transverse to the feed path.

26. The imaging device of claim 21, wherein the optical sensor is 5 configured to iteratively view the scan region to define successive viewable patterns, and wherein the processor is configured to note a change in viewable pattern from a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern to a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern, and upon noting such change, to begin recording of successive viewable patterns.

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27. The imaging device of claim 26, wherein the processor is further 15 configured to note a change in viewable pattern from a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern to a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern, and upon noting such change, to cease recording of successive viewable patterns.

28. An imaging device including a scan region with a backing having a reference pattern thereon, the imaging device comprising:

means for viewing through the scan region to identify successive viewable 20 patterns; and

means for comparing the successive viewable patterns with the reference pattern, a difference between viewable pattern and reference pattern signifying presence in the scan region of an object which is to be scanned by the imaging device.

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29. The imaging device of claim 28, which further comprises means for noting a change in viewable pattern from a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern to a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern, and upon noting such change, for beginning recording of successive viewable patterns.

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30. The imaging device of claim 29, which further comprises means for noting a change in viewable pattern from a pattern substantially different from the reference pattern to a pattern substantially identical to the reference pattern, and upon noting such change, for ceasing recording of successive viewable patterns.

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